

SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY ASSISTANTS¹

Some divisions have considered using assistants to supplement the services of the speech-language pathologist. The special education staffing requirements (*Virginia Special Education Regulations*, 8 VAC 20-80-45) do not include a paraprofessional for speech-language caseloads, as they do for classroom special education teachers. This does not prohibit the use of paraprofessionals; however, they must be used with caution.

IDEA specifies that a paraprofessional is an appropriately trained employee who assists and is supervised by qualified professional staff. In Virginia, there is no credentialing of assistants, resulting in local determination of the nature, degree, and quantity of training. The Virginia Administrative Code addresses the use of Speech-Language Pathology assistants (SLPA) and supervisory responsibilities of the licensed SLP (18 VAC 30-20-240).

The Virginia Administrative Code (18 VAC 30-20-240) states that:

1. A licensed audiologist and speech-language pathologist shall provide documented supervision to unlicensed assistants, shall be held fully responsible for their performance and activities, and shall ensure that they perform only those activities which do not constitute the practice of audiology or speech-language pathology and which are commensurate with their level of training.
2. The identity of the unlicensed assistant shall be disclosed to the client prior to treatment and shall be made a part of the client's file.

As a result, the paraprofessional is not allowed to practice independently and must be supervised by qualified staff. Given these restrictions, the following list reflects those tasks a speech-language assistant may assume:

- ◆ Assisting the speech-language pathologist with screening;
- ◆ Assisting the speech-language pathologist with copying, distributing, and filing special education forms, and contacting parents to set up meetings;
- ◆ Preparing materials;
- ◆ Assisting with transporting children to and from services (within the school); and
- ◆ Monitoring the child's performance, following the directions provided by the speech-language pathologist and only after the speech-language pathologist has verified that the assistant can accurately gather the data.

Speech-language pathology assistants may not be used to provide services to the caseload in the absence of qualified speech-language pathologists. A speech-language pathologist with an assistant may serve more students than the division average, but not higher than the caseload maximum of 68 (*Virginia Special Education Regulations*, Appendix A). School divisions may consider the addition of a speech-language assistant to facilitate the completion of nonclinical duties.

¹ For further information on using special education paraprofessionals, see the Virginia Department of Education document, *The Virginia Paraprofessional Guide to Supervision and Collaboration: A Partnership*.